

Genesis 15:1-6: After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, ^s your very great reward. ^t” ² But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.” ⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” ⁵ He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

INTRODUCTION

IMAGE:

- **When you think of a description of faith, do you ever think of something like a horse’s blinders—“blind faith”? Faith only survives to the extent we ignore the “facts” that seem to challenge it?**
- **Story of Abram, and see him believing God...how? Was he able to believe by putting on blinders so he couldn’t see the “facts” that stood in the way of God’s promise...his age, Sarai’s barrenness, and how long it had been since God made the promise?**
- **And when God tells US something in His Word and calls us to trust and obey Him, do we have to “put on blinders” to the “facts” to believe and obey?**
- **But this account shows us that (1) True Christian faith does not mean putting on blinders: Faith faces the facts. (2) Facing the facts does not necessitate unbelief... We’ll see that it actually does the exact opposite.**

GOD’S PROMISE/GUARANTEE

Genesis 15:1-6: After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, ^s your very great reward. ^t”

“After this...” Link with previous chapter: Abram has refused to manufacture his own reward or enrich himself; now GOD affirms that HE is the source of Abram’s reward. He will give Abram what Abram refused to seize for himself at the expense of God’s glory.

If Abram had tried to manufacture the good life for himself, he would have made life that much harder, and if he never took God at His word, he would have missed out on the life God would give him.

And it **doesn't say, “I will give you a shield.” God HIMSELF IS Abram's shield.** And from Scripture as a whole, we know that God Himself is also the ultimate reward of our faith. If you're following God first because of perks or blessings that are distinct from God Himself, you are missing the ultimate reward. Ultimately, pray that God shows you the emptiness of all other blessings APART from Him.

But **what good is a reward or a huge estate for Abram with no one to inherit it?**

ABRAM'S QUESTION: OBSTACLE TO THE PROMISE...OR CLARIFYING THE PROMISE

² **But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?”** ³ **And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”**

Abram sounds **frustrated**. He trusts that God's promises are the driving force in “his” life, but there's still no sign of the biggest one being fulfilled. **Month after month**, and Sarai still isn't pregnant. Without a son, how will he become a great nation? He's wealthy but still barren.

There seems to be a **mismatch between the promise and the visible facts**. Maybe Abram even feels like God is **stringing him along**. **Has God's forgotten** His promise?

And maybe Abram is also **wondering** whether the “great nation” God had promised would **come through an adopted heir**. **So he asks God**.

I think we see something about faith here. If Abram didn't have any faith, he wouldn't even have made the effort to ask God this question. (SLOW) **The presence of questions doesn't mean the absence of faith**.

Faith is able to wrestle with God's promise. You don't have to pretend that everything makes sense!

And **asking God questions is SOMETIMES EVIDENCE** of faith. **Doubt speaks only ABOUT God; faith speaks TO God**. So if you are **talking about God but stop talking to Him**, that's a **warning sign**...and a call to pray with other Christians and start praying your questions to God—perhaps through the words of the Psalms! **Questions must turn you to prayer**. He is a God who responds, even if not always in the time or way you might choose.

In asking this question, we see that **Abram isn't putting on blinders**. God is big enough to handle Abram's and your confusion.

GOD RE-AFFIRMS AND SPECIFIES PROMISE

⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” ⁵ He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

God will give Abram his own biological child.

But God **DOESN'T** give Abram a full explanation or formula for HOW He'll do this. He doesn't point Abram to chapter 12 of a biology 301 textbook, to explain how it was still possible for Sarai to get pregnant.

So all Abram has is **God's Word, and the visible sign of the stars** to remind Abram of God's promise. In a sense, like bread and wine...and the water of baptism. But although those assure us of God's promise, they aren't formulas.

(SLOW) But then the **question is whether Abram (and you and I) will be satisfied with God's answer, trust, and follow Him; or whether we will stay in a place of perpetually questioning** unless God gives us the formula.

To pretend we have no questions may be apathy or denial; **to doubt God's promise—**even when we don't understand how He'll fulfill it—**is prideful and foolish.**

And over the course of Abram's life, **God is fulfilling pieces of the promise, like appetizers** to prepare him for the ultimate fulfillment.

If Sarai had gotten pregnant at age 20, it would have been less obvious that this was GOD's doing (although no pregnancy happens apart from him), AND it this account would be discouraging to us when we don't see God's promise being fulfilled in our timing. But **if Sarai has a son at her old age**, they and we will have an obvious testimony to God's power—and that **even if years go by, God still doesn't forget His promises.**

And Abram will have **learned to trust God** even over the course of years of waiting. And even after Isaac was born, there would be more waiting—but God would never have forgotten His promise. Isaac's birth leads to the Israelite people as a great nation...which ultimately leads to Jesus' birth as the only one who can actually rescue Israel and the gentiles...which then leads to the growth of Jesus' Body, the Church...a truly “great nation” gathered by God's gracious power in Jesus.

RESPONSE

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Abram asks > hears God’s response > believes.

This is huge! Abram **could have perpetually wrestled** with this and declared himself an agnostic, since God didn’t give him a formula. But that would be **demanding a degree of explanation in life** that we will never have in this life.

Questioning and seeking is ok up to a point, but **perpetual questioning will simply mean paralysis and ultimately be foolish**. (Mention John Guest, In Search of Certainty—and my story **sophomore year**.) **GOD knows the times and dates**; HE knows when He’ll give Abram a child; Abram doesn’t need to know when.

Abram isn’t asked to believe without evidence, but here **the only evidence he has for God keeping His promise is his past experience** of God’s power and faithfulness. He has to rely on God’s reputation and character.

Think of a two-year-old boy whose mother promises she’ll come back after a work trip: The child doesn’t understand airplanes, how they fly (Bernoulli Effect), rental cars, etc., but because his mother has come back before, he believes her. That’s reasonable—and it would be unreasonable to doubt parent!

So even though all Abram has is God’s Word, **he believes Him and rests in His promise**.

And **God credited Abram’s faith to him as righteousness**. The same word for “credited” is used in **Psalm 32:2**: “Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not COUNT against them...” **Abram is counted as right with God on the basis of his faith in God**. And even that faith wasn’t something Abram himself created: God initiated when He called Abram and promised to bless him. God is the author of our faith, and our faith in Him is what allows us to approach Him without fear—because He Himself has swept away our sins and carries us to Himself in Jesus.

It’s so easy to think of righteousness/goodness as determined by what we DO; in the Bible we find that **it is based on believing the promise of GOD...Faith is an open hand** to receive God’s free grace and goodness for us in Jesus: Reconciliation with Him through Christ. And here faith is how Abram receives and banks on God’s promise to him.

(PAUSE) This verse quoted three times in the New Testament as well. Go to Romans 4. Here we see Paul showing **how this story isn't just about Abram, but is also** for us.

Romans 4: ¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ^t

Abraham believed God's promise. But then Paul reminds us of the facts that could have tempted him to disbelieve God:

¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, (SLOW) he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

Faith faces the facts. Abram **didn't try to pretend** that he was younger than he was or that Sarai was fertile. He **didn't put on blinders** to block out the facts of how impossible (humanly speaking) it was that he and Sarai would have children.

²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

Abram faced the visible facts, but **focused on the GREATER fact of God's promise and power!** It's not blind faith, because Abram has already caught glimpses of who God is and what He can do.

This is actually similar to **experimental science**: An experiment on a small level can be predictive of the results of something larger in scale. So much more with God: **Knowing what He has promised and DONE can give us confidence for what He has promised and WILL DO—despite all the visible “facts”** that seem to stand in the way.

So true Christian faith isn't blind; UNBELIEF is blind because it only sees what is visible and closes its eyes to the greatest fact of all: GOD's promise and power!

And Abram's “faith does not earn or merit righteousness. God's gracious action preceded anything that Abram is or does...” (NIB 449) **And we know that God Himself is the source of faith: “I believe; help my unbelief!”**

GOD'S PROMISE/GUARANTEES FOR US

And then Paul applies this for us:

²² This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” ²³ The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, ²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Faith is the only way anyone can receive Jesus—who alone by His death and resurrection buries our sins forever and makes us forever right with God. And **if we don’t stake our life on HIS promises and HIS power, we will lose our lives forever. But God has promised LIFE to all who come to Jesus in faith**, and no matter the visible “facts” that make us wonder about this promise, He is trustworthy and able.

Of course, we do need to know **what God has NOT promised us**. He hasn’t promised...

- A **stress-free job** or family environment (though following Him will allow for healthier relationships and a better approach to work)
- **Financial stability** (although there are things you can do to work towards this)
- A **boyfriend or girlfriend**, or spouse (though you can be active or passive, and He may give one)
- **Children** (but He has promised you Himself and His family in this life—including the joy of having a role in others come to Christ through your life—and complete joy when Jesus returns)
- **Comfort**, or freedom from suffering for Christ (He’s promised the opposite—maybe even to the point of martyrdom—but with strength and blessings that make that sacrifice pale in comparison)

If we’re demanding these things from God, we will be disappointed. But if we are wholeheartedly seeking HIM alongside other Christians **even in the midst of a hard job** or financial struggles or a breakup, we will find Him. But we can’t go it alone: Often we will need to remind each other and be reminded of His promises when He seems far away or seems to have forgotten us.

Because He HAS promised you Himself...eternal peace with Him for all who yield to Jesus as Savior and King, all your sins swept away, and all your tears wiped away when Christ returns. He’s promised to never forsake you, to provide all you need for the life and ministry He has for you, to give you satisfaction in relationship with Him—a satisfaction that the best human relationship is just a glimpse of.

Abram didn’t close his eyes to the “facts” standing in the way of God’s promise, but trusted that God and his promise was **sufficient** for him.

And in Jesus, all of God’s promises are ours by faith. Without faith in Jesus, we have no promises, and without promises, we have nothing but judgment.

Is He and his promises sufficient for you, as you hear and believe them in the context of Christ’s body, the Church? (Again, **you can’t go it alone**—we need to be reminding each other of God’s promises and spurring one another on in following Him.)

But why is God so “slow”? Is He just stringing us along? What is the purpose?

2 Peter 3:9: “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

But even considering this, sometimes we just don’t understand why God seems slow...and we just have to trust that He loves us more than we even love ourselves. We just have to trust that He is good and He has not forgotten us.

APPLICATION

Often we aren’t even reaching for God’s promises, and instead are trying to enrich ourselves in contrast to Abram in previous passage. When we start believing that we can do life better than God, we stop clinging to His promises and instead try to build our own kingdom. The only answer then is to stop trying to enrich or secure ourselves, and to start listening to God’s promises, believing, and obeying His commands.

There are lots of obstacles—“facts” that seem to get in the way of God fulfilling His promises...but **even though faith faces those facts**, above all it faces the fact of GOD’S PROMISE AND FAITHFULNESS AND POWER.

So faith faces the **facts of your own sin**...you don’t have to pretend you aren’t responsible or that your sins is less bad than it is (but you also don’t have to let false guilt cling to you), because all of your sin was nailed to the cross and buried forever with Jesus. So you can freely confess and forsake it and run to Him! (Share Luther’s “conversations” with the Devil)

Faith faces the **facts of how you have been sinned against**... (You don’t have to pretend or make excuses for someone else...you can acknowledge how they’ve wronged you, but above all you can acknowledge that only Jesus can deal with and carry their wrongdoing: You cannot carry it or hang it over their head, because you stand in need of the same mercy they need. So as you release their sin and your bitterness to Jesus, that frees you

to BEGIN the (often long!) process of forgiveness, and also frees you to confront them truthfully in love.

Faith faces the **facts of science**... (It doesn't always LOOK like the Bible and science line up...but Scripture and the natural world are like two “books” both authored by God, that both reveal Him in different ways...And the same God who created the stars He showed Abram, also wrote His Word...But we are like young children trying to read those books, and so we don't always read them rightly: The two may appear to contradict each other, but that's our imperfect reading, not a true mismatch between the natural world and God's Word.)

Faith faces the **fact God's apparent slowness** (2 Peter)—but finds God's promise and Christ's body sufficient while we wait. And **faith pleads with God for strength and faith when we feel we have none**—because there will be those times! But God is still faithful.

So above all, **faith faces the fact of God's faithfulness and power to do** what He has promised. And **true faith leads to trust and active obedience**.

Romans 4:20: And in believing God, **you are giving GLORY to Him**. He is able!

GOSPEL CONCLUSION

IMAGE:

- **Who are the ones wearing the blinders?** BOTH those **who close their eyes** to the visible facts AND those **who doubt God's promises**—closing their eyes to God's promise and power.
- True Christian faith: (1) acknowledges the visible facts (2) focuses on the greater fact of God's faithfulness and power. “being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised...”

God has promised that all who receive Jesus are forever adopted as God's own sons and daughters—new creations, all our sins forgiven and the promise of all our brokenness healed.

But none of these promises can be found apart from Jesus—not in good deeds, not in religion or church affiliation, not in human relationships, not in atheism or any human legacy. So this passage is **not just a nice little reflection on how it's comforting to trust God**; the stakes are life or death. But for all who yield to Jesus as their Savior and Lord, who stake their lives on His promises and power, who receive God's grace in Him and

follow after Him, life is theirs—ours—forever...no matter how slow God might seem in keeping His promise.

And we get to—and are commanded to—bring this promise of life to all who will hear. Ask God for opportunities, and trust that He works even through your weaknesses. Just as God has promised life to all who look to Jesus, **He has also promised that as you go to make disciples—even when it might feel like He is worlds away—He is with you always,** to the very end of the age.

And there will come a day when our faith will turn to sight, when Christ returns to judge the world, and to save all who find their refuge in Him.

PRAYER